

**Opening Statement
Chairman Mark Souder**

**“Gangs, Fraud and Sexual Predators: Struggling with the
Consequences of Illegal Immigration”**

**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy
And Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform**

April 12, 2006

Good morning and thank you all for coming. Today, our Subcommittee will address some of the issues surrounding the debate on illegal immigration, which as we all know is now a very contentious topic. I want to thank, first of all, Representative Virginia Foxx, your congresswoman, who is a member of this Subcommittee and has been an energetic advocate for greater border security and enforcement. And I want to thank the witnesses who are here today to give us their input. I will be introducing them shortly.

The House of Representatives has already passed legislation aimed at halting the flow of illegal aliens across our border and, as we all know, the Senate just last week came close to passing its own immigration reform bill. The Senate's failure demonstrates the tremendous polarization on this issue. The great majority of the American people feel strongly that the Federal government is failing its responsibilities to defend our borders, and the growing anger and frustration is palpable. On the other hand, immigrants—many undoubtedly here illegally—are taking to the streets in large numbers, waving the flags of foreign nations and demanding that the government essentially continue to be passive.

This debate raises questions which are difficult, but which we must fearlessly confront. Who are we as a people? Is it fair to taxpayers and citizens in general for us to massively subsidize millions of illegal immigrants in our midst? Should we continue to shrug our shoulders and discourage any talk of the criminal elements among these illegal immigrants, lest we be accused of being bigots? Or should we courageously and responsibly confront these problems head-on?

Since 2001, the illegal immigrant population in this country has been swelling by an estimated 700,000 annually. After crossing the border, most illegal immigrants undoubtedly would prefer to quietly find work and earn money rather than participate in any activity that might draw the attention of law enforcement. However, some of them feel no such restraint, as many Federal, state and local police agencies will attest.

It is in cities like Winston-Salem, as well as smaller communities, that the presence of criminals who have illegally entered the country is most keenly felt. In many cases, such elements come together to form classic street gangs, staking out territories and dedicating themselves to controlling the local drug trade. In most cases, the drug trade is the engine that drives other criminal activity, particularly property crimes and robberies, as addicts who are unable to keep steady employment choose a life of petty crime to finance their drug addiction.

Recognizing the expanding threat from Hispanic street gangs—as well as the fact that they are largely composed of illegal aliens—the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) launched Operation Community Shield in February 2005 as a comprehensive initiative to disrupt and dismantle transnational, violent street gangs. We will be hearing more about this vital project, which promises to be very helpful to state and local authorities in controlling and shutting down criminal gang activity by illegal aliens.

For local law enforcement in places like North Carolina, such help is coming not a moment too soon. Local police lack the authority to hold suspects on immigration violations and have had to release them when lacking probable cause for other crimes. With Operation Community Shield in place, they now provide ICE with intelligence on gang organization and leadership learned through their investigation of general crime, which enables ICE to arrest, prosecute and/or deport individual gang members. Since the Operation was launched, ICE agents have arrested over 160 such gang members in North Carolina.

In the same vein, ICE's Operation Predator (which targets rapists, pedophiles, human traffickers and those who traffic in pornographic images of children) has been focused on foreign national sex offenders, some of whom have, unfortunately, come to North Carolina. Sexual predators who are here illegally present different challenges to local law enforcement, and ICE agents bring valuable investigative tools and authority to their efforts to stop foreign sex predators from victimizing their children.

Additionally, illegal immigration is straining government at all levels throughout the country as schools, hospitals and welfare agencies—as well as law enforcement—are pressed to respond to the needs of new populations that are consuming far more in tax revenue than they pay.

Few states have had to struggle with this burden as much as North Carolina. Its illegal alien population is approaching half a million, and it had the highest Hispanic population growth of any state in the 1990s. During the 90s, the immigrant population of Forsyth county exploded by 515%, meaning that two-thirds of the county's foreign-born population had entered in just 10 years.¹ The state government estimates that each illegal Hispanic immigrant is saddling it with a net cost of \$102 annually.² Medicaid costs due to illegal immigration have doubled in five years. The state is spending over \$200 million annually to educate the children of illegal immigrants, a more than 2000% increase in ten years.³ Across the state, the criminal justice system is disrupted as courts and law enforcement struggle—particularly in rural counties—to find translators to assist in investigations and court proceedings for Spanish-speaking defendants. Too many stresses and strains on state and local government are accelerating at once, and there is clearly a need for government at all levels to decisively reverse these trends.

This hearing will examine these problems, probe the response of Federal, state and local governments and solicit solutions.

For our first panel, we are joined by Mr. Jeffrey S. Jordan, Special Agent of the United States Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

For our second panel, we are joined by Thomas J. Keith, District Attorney for the 21st Prosecutorial District; Mr. Dale Folwell, currently your State Representative and formerly of the Forsyth County School Board; Ms. Debra Conrad-Shrader, Vice-Chair of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners; and Ms. Barbara Holland, Director of the Zero Armed Perpetrators program of Forsyth County.

We thank all of you for joining us today, and we look forward to your testimony.

¹ The Federation for American Immigration Reform, County Factsheet, Forsyth County, North Carolina, at www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_research2eb7_sup.

² The News & Observer, February 26, 2006.

³ The News & Observer, February 27, 2006.